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AUTHOR Santa Rita, Emilio
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ABSTRACT

Between Fall 1976 and Spring 1978, a study was conducted at Bronx Community College (BCC) to determine: (1) the effect of probationary status on students' subsequent academic performance as measured by grade point average (GPA); (2) whether a response-to-probation phenomenon continued beyond the semester of probation; and (3) the effects of performance differences in various subject areas on the results. The study subjects were students in the College of Discovery program, who had enrolled in BCC in Fall 1975 and had completed 36 credits after Fall 1976. A probation group of 18 males and 27 females with a cumulative GPA between 1.75 and 1.94 was compared with a non-probation group of 30 males and 30 females with a cumulative GPA of exactly 2.00. The study revealed that probation students made higher cumulative and semester GPA's in Spring 1977 than non-probation students. A comparison of the Fall 1976, Spring and Fall 1977, and Spring 1978 GPA's of the groups revealed that the female probation group earned a higher mean GPA than the non-probation group for all three semesters after probation, while the male probation group earned a higher mean GPA only in Spring 1977. Very low grades in business courses were an important factor in women's assignment to probationary status; while men were generally on probation because of low grades in business, mathematics, and technology courses. (Author/AYC)

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Students on Academic Probation at Bronx Community College:

The Effects of Academic Probation on the Scholastic Performance of College Discovery Students.

Report I.

Emilio Santa Rita
Department of Student Development

Bronx Community College

June 14, 1978

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Report I - **Students** on Academic Probation at Bronx Community College: the Effects of Academic Probation on the Scholastic Performance of College Discovery Students.

The study covered the semester terms of Fall 1976 to Spring 1978 of College Discovery Students in academic difficulty. The purpose of this study was: I - to determine the effect of probationary status on students' subsequent academic performance as measured by GPA; II - to determine whether a response-to-probation phenomenon continued beyond the semester of probation; and III - to determine the extent to which the results might be attributed to differential performance in various subject areas.

I - Students on academic probation made higher (not statistically significant) 4th semester GPA's than those not on probation, in spite of the fact that their 3rd semester grades were lower.

II - Over a period of four consecutive semesters following academic probation, the mean grade-point averages of a group of College Discovery students who were on academic probation were compared with the mean GPA's of a group who had made a C average (2.00) and were not on academic probation. The probation group was composed of students whose 3rd semester GPA's were near the borderline of success -- between 1.75 and 1.94 on a four-point grading scale. The non-probation group included some students who were on probation after the 3rd semester. For females, the probation group earned higher mean GPA's than the non-probation group for three consecutive semesters. In the case of males, the mean GPA of the probation group exceeded that of the non-probation group in the 4th semester, but the non-probation group earned higher grades than the probation subjects in the subsequent two semesters.

III - For these same groups, grade point averages in various subject areas were compared. Very low grades in Business courses constituted the most important factor in the assignment of women to probationary status. Improvement in the Foreign languages (Spanish) accounted for women's fourth semester academic gains to a considerable degree, although substantial improvement was shown in other areas as well. Men were on probation because of generally low grades in Business, Mathematics, and Techonology courses, and they made their foourth semester gains in Physical Education, Foreign languages (Spanish), and Social Studies.

Emilio Santa Rita
Department of Student Development
June 14, 1978

Since the Fall term of 1976, Bronx Community College has employed a system whereby students who fail to meet certain academic standards are placed on probation until their grades reach an acceptable level. A student on probation is in a precarious position in that continued poor scholarship may lead to academic suspension from the college. The purpose of this study was:

I. To determine the effect of probationary status on students' subsequent academic performance as measured by grade-point average (GPA);

II. To determine whether a response-to-probation phenomenon continued beyond the semester of probation;

III. To determine the extent to which the results might be attributed to differential performance in various subject areas. It might be hypothesized for example, that students who are placed on probation manage to improve their grade-point average (GPA) by a judicious selection of courses in which they have a favorable chance to do well, or that students on probation are in that unhappy state largely because of particularly low grades in certain subjects.

Method

Subjects

Subjects of the first part of the study were 18 male and 27 female students who entered BCC in the Fall term of 1975 under the auspices of College Discovery Program, who have completed two consecutive semesters and have been carrying at least a 12-credit load each semester. Thirty male and 30 females made up the "Non-probation" groups. For our study, probation students were those whose semester's cumulative GPA's were in the range of 1.75 to 1.94 with 36 or more cumulative credits completed by the end of the Fall term of 1976. (The college uses a system in which four points are given for an A, three for a B, two for a C, one for a D and zero for an F). A GPA of 1.75 might be obtained, for example, by a combination of three C's and a D in courses of equal credits. Non-probation students were those whose semester's cumulative GPA's were exactly 2.00 with 36 or more cumulative credits completed at the conclusion of the Fall term of 1976. Selection was limited to students from the larger pool of the College Discovery student population. Cases were limited to those at the borderline of academic success in order to obtain groups whose cumulative GPA's were approximately at the same level.

Subjects of the second part of the study were those students in the groups just described who attended and continued to attend BCC--a total of 6 consecutive semesters. Students who dropped out or stopped out for one or more semesters were excluded as well as individuals who transferred to other colleges.

It is important to note that after the semester of probation neither of the terms Probation or Non-probation described the respective groups accurately, because the status of some subjects in each group had changed as a result of their academic performance. Some individuals in the Non-probation groups were subsequently on probation; some in the Probation groups were restored to good standing; some in each group changed from one status to the other and back again in the course of the succeeding semesters. To have purified both

groups so that the terms Probation and Non-Probation would be accurately descriptive throughout the succeeding semesters would have resulted in too drastic a reduction in the size of the groups. As a consequence of the decision to preserve the original groups, the actual difference between Probation and Non-probation subjects lies in their status during the semester following probation. The number of students in each group on probation during each semester is shown in Table 1.

Procedure

For Part I of the study, third-and fourth-semester GPA's were computed for Probation and Non-Probation groups for each sex.

In the second phase of the study, the mean GPA of each group was computed for each consecutive semesters following probation. In addition, the mean cumulative GPA at the end of each semester was calculated for each group.

For PartIII of the study, courses taken and in which letter grades were recorded for the students in all groups were classified in the following categories: (1) Business (including Accounting, Business Math, Data Programming), (2) Education (including Health & Physical Education courses), (3) Foreign Language, i.e. Spanish, (4) Mathematics, (5) Secretarial Studies, (6) Social Studies, and (7) Technology (including ET, MLT). For each subject category the mean number of credits per semester and mean semester GPA were computed for each of the four groups.

Results

Part I. Results of the first analysis are presented in Table 2. For both sexes, mean fourth-semester GPA's were higher for Probation than for Non-Probation subjects, but the differences were not statistically significant. Students on probation seem to have improved their GPA's in the semester following probation.

Males not on probation showed a decrease in GPA from the third to the fourth semester while females in this category showed no appreciable change.

Part II. Results of the second part of the study are shown in Tables 3 and 4. Table 3 shows mean GPA's of the four groups for each semester. Table 4 shows cumulative mean GPA's at the end of each semester. For both sexes, the mean GPA of the Probation groups was higher than that of the Non-probation group in the fourth semester, and this difference held for females up to the sixth semester. In the case of males, the Non-probation group overtook the Probation group in the fifth semester.

It seems reasonable to conclude that, for females, the consistent superiority of the Probation group was not due to chance. For males, the phenomenon of the Probation group's moving ahead for one semester and then being overtaken by the Non-probation group may be considered a suggestive finding rather than a conclusive one.

Table 1

Number of Students on Probation
During Each Semester

Semester	Male		Female	
	Pro-bation N=18	Non-Pro N=30	Pro-bation N=27	Non-Pro N=30
3	18	0	27	0
4	0	8	0	6
5*	5	13	6	10
6*	3	2	5	9

*Students who slipped back into probation were suspended and later reinstated on appeal.

Table 2

Third-and Fourth-Semester GPA's of 105 College Discovery Students
Near the Borderline of Academic Success

Academic Status	N	3rd Semester[a] GPA Range	Mean GPA 3rd Semester	Mean GPA 4th Semester
Male				
Probation	18	1.75-1.94	1.85	2.27
Non-Probation	30	2.00	2.00	2.16
Female				
Probation	27	1.75-1.94	1.85	2.33
Non-Probation	30	2.00	2.00	2.15

[a]Students were previously enrolled at BCC for two consecutive semesters into 9/76 when BHE retention standards were implemented at the college.

Table 3

Mean Semester GPA's of 105 CD students Near the Borderline of Academic Success and Attended Six Consecutive Semesters

Academic Status	N	Mean Semester GPA 9/76[a]	2/77	9/77	2/78
Male					
Probation	18	1.85	2.27	2.14	2.25
Non-Probation	30	2.00	2.16	2.21	2.32
Female					
Probation	27	1.85	2.33	2.48	2.54
Non-Probation	30	2.00	2.15	2.30	2.48

[a]The semester in which BHE retention standards were implemented at the College. Students were enrolled at BCC two consecutive semesters prior to 9/76.

Table 4

Cumulative Mean GPA's of 105 CD Students Near the Borderline of Academic Success and Attended Six Consecutive Semesters

Academic Status	N	Mean Cumulative GPA 9/76[a]	2/77	9/77	2/78
Male					
Probation	18	1.86	2.17	2.09	2.14
Non-Probation	30	2.00	2.08	2.28	2.22
Female					
Probation	27	1.86	2.22	2.30	2.34
Non-Probation	30	2.00	2.05	2.23	2.27

[a]The semester in which BHE retention standards were implemented at the College. Students were enrolled at BCC two consecutive semesters prior to 9/76.

Part III. The mean number of credits and mean GPA in each subject area are shown in Tables 5 and 6 for males and females, respectively. General results without regard for the Probation and Non-Probation categories, may be summarized as follows: In regard to choice of subjects, the differences between the sexes were most marked in the areas of foreign languages and business courses, with women choosing more of the former and men more of the latter. Women elected more courses in the social studies. Women made higher grades in the foreign languages (Spanish) and men in Physical Education courses.

The female Probation group might be considered most worthy of consideration since it was the group that showed the greatest academic improvement in the semester following probation. The following points may be noted in the tabulated results: The female Probation group (1) performed very poorly in the Business courses in the third semester, reduced the number of credits considerably in this area in the fourth semester; (2) chose a comparatively large number of credits in the foreign languages and made reasonably good grades in the fourth semester; (3) made its highest grades in the foreign languages and Education courses and led the four groups in these areas.

The male Probation group came to grief in the Business and Technology areas in the third semester. In the fourth semester the group showed improvement in all categories except Business, with the greatest gains being made in Physical Education courses, foreign language, and social studies.

Non-Probation women made their highest grades in the foreign languages, but they chose the greatest number of courses in the social studies. They differed from the Probation women mainly in the Business courses area showing a fourth-semester decline while the Probation group made a substantial gain. Their gain in the social studies was also considerably less than that of the Probation group. For both female groups, grades in mathematics probably had a negligible effect on group GPA's because so few courses were elected in this area.

Non-probation males showed a rather consistent pattern of GPA's near the 2.00 level. Their fourth semester decline was due mainly to low grades in Business courses and mathematics.

Discussion

GPA, as a measure of scholastic achievement in research, has its limitations; grades assigned by instructors are not normally distributed

Table 5

Third-and Fourth-Semester Credits and GPA's in Various Subject Areas for 48 Male CD Students Near the Borderline of Academic Success

	Probation[a] (N=18)				Non-Probation[b] (N=30)			
	Mean Credits		Mean GPA		Mean Credits		Mean GPA	
Subject Area	Sem.3	Sem.4	Sem.3	Sem.4	Sem.3	Sem.4	Sem.3	Sem.4
Business	4.34	4.00	1.59	1.47	4.12	4.43	2.07	1.91
Education	2.86	2.98	2.02	2.30	2.90	2.86	2.01	2.13
Foreign Language	1.24	2.11	1.89	2.27	1.16	0.95	2.02	2.05
Mathematics	2.21	1.72	1.72	1.77	2.03	1.84	2.03	1.63
Secretarial Studies	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Social Studies	3.02	3.19	1.77	2.08	3.00	3.13	2.06	2.04
Technology	4.24	3.56	1.69	1.71	4.32	4.53	2.09	1.98

[a]Third semester GPA range: 1.75-1.94

[b]Third semester GPA's all 2.00

Table 6

Third-and Fourth-Semester Credits and GPA's in Various Subject Areas for 57 Female CD Students Near the Borderline of Academic Success

	Probation[a] (N=27)				Non-Probation[b] (N=30)			
	Mean Credits		Mean GPA		Mean Credits		Mean GPA	
Subject Area	Sem.3	Sem.4	Sem.3	Sem.4	Sem.3	Sem.4	Sem.3	Sem.4
Business	4.12	2.55	1.40	1.91	4.11	3.79	1.88	1.63
Education	1.11	0.80	1.87	2.32	1.32	0.86	1.93	1.98
Foreign Language	3.44	3.74	2.11	2.54	3.14	3.64	2.01	2.34
Mathematics	0.67	0.48	1.50	1.84	0.35	0.21	1.60	1.83
Secretarial Studies	2.83	2.74	1.87	1.96	2.79	2.85	2.09	2.19
Social Studies	3.44	3.74	1.89	2.21	3.14	3.98	1.96	2.01
Technology	0.80	0.35	1.47	1.89	1.29	1.34	1.86	1.83

[a]Third semester GPA range: 1.75-1.94

[b]Third semester GPA's all 2.00

from A to F, and that therefore statistical procedures based upon assumptions of normally distributed measures are not appropriate, etc. However, it is a fact of academic life that the GPA is used in assigning students to probationary status, and therefore there seemed to be no alternative but to use it in this study, limitations notwithstanding.

Part I. The results of this part of the study provide rather convincing evidence that placing certain students on probation motivates them to achieve higher grades. Although such improvement did occur, increases in GPA were to be expected for these students because they had more hope for improvement. It may be that students who miss the success criterion (2.00)--a not so distant margin are more optimistic about their chances than those who fail miserably, and so study harder when given a second chance. In any event, the results of this study are valid only for students who "almost" succeed in their college semester of probation.

Part II. The probation jolt appears to be somewhat greater initially for women than for men, and there is rather substantial evidence that the effect is also more long-lasting for women.

The appearance of a more complex patterns of achievement among males may be due in part to a serious but practically unavoidable flaw in the design of the study -- that the groups designated as "Non-probation" were so only in the third and fourth semester. During the fifth and sixth semesters, half the subjects in the male Non-probation group were actually on probation (see Table 1). This fact may account for the marked increase in the mean GPA for this group during these two semesters. On the other hand, a considerable proportion of female subjects in the corresponding group were also on probation after the fourth semester, and although there was a corresponding increase in mean GPA for these subjects, the change was not great enough to enable them to overtake the original Probation group. In the light of this finding it seems reasonable to conclude that the early probation experience has a greater effect on women than on men.

Part III. It appears that courses in Business, Mathematics, and Technology constitute critical areas for CD students at the borderline of academic success. One group of women in this study apparently slipped into probationary status largely because of low Business courses-grades, and two other groups (Non-probation male and female) failed to show overall improvement in the fourth semester because Business-courses grades declined while

grades in most other areas either maintained their levels or showed gains.

The female Probation group in this study may have been made up of women with strong background in the Spanish language. Consequently, their improvement in the fourth semester following probation may have been due less to a global response to the "punishment" of probation than to a well-advised reduction of Business courses credits and an investment in their strong area.

College counselors are probably aware of the difficulties that some students encounter in Business courses, Mathematics, and Technologies. It would seem that students whose previous grade reports predict borderline achievement might well be advised to avoid electing such high-risk courses in their semester of probation, especially if there is evidence that other adjustment problems will need to be solved. There seems to be more of a need to steer the men clear of their most troublesome areas--Business, Mathematics, Technologies--since they are most inclined to elect many courses in these areas in their semester of probation.

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